



WASHINGTON BUREAU · NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

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February 21, 2018

Members

Federal Communications Commission

445 12th Street, SW

Washington, D.C. 20554

**RE: NAACP STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE *LIFELINE* PROGRAM, WC DOCKET NUMBERS
17-287, 11-42, 09-197**

Dear Commissioner,

On behalf of the NAACP, our nation's oldest, largest and most widely-recognized grassroots-based civil rights organization, I strongly urge you to support a robust *Lifeline* program and I urge you to reject the proposals to decimate the program which are currently before you. The ability to effectively communicate with the world outside of your home is of the utmost importance.

The *Lifeline* program was initiated in 1985 by President Ronald Reagan to help bring telecommunication capabilities to all Americans and to provide subsidized basic phone service for low-income consumers. *Lifeline* is a program that has worked: the percentage of low-income households with phone service has increased from 80% in 1985, when *Lifeline* began, to nearly 92% in 2011. In 2005, soon after Hurricane Katrina, the *Lifeline* program was expanded by President George W. Bush to include wireless service. Beginning in December, 2017, the *Lifeline* program was scheduled to transition from telephone-only to include broadband internet services within a five-year period. The expansion to broadband would have helped these low-income Americans not only stay in touch, it would have helped close the digital divide. In recent years, the *Lifeline* program has also undergone rigorous overhauls to improve program integrity.

The typical *Lifeline* subscriber makes just \$14,000 per year; currently, nearly 13 million low-income Americans use *Lifeline*. *Lifeline* is designed to give consumers a choice between approved voice-only service, broadband-only service, or a bundled voice and data service from approved wireline (e.g., copper or fiber line to the home) or wireless companies.

It is because of *Lifeline* that more American seniors can call their loved ones, neighbors, or emergency services in the event of a mishap. *Lifeline* allows subscribers to speak with their child's educators. It is because of *Lifeline* that workers can stay on top of their fulltime, or multiple part-time, shift schedules. *Lifeline* has enabled Veterans to access the health, educational, and financial benefits to which they are entitled. For low-income families, a telephone is a key connection to education and economic opportunities, and safety during times of emergencies. Working families need affordable *Lifeline* service to survive and have a shot at economic opportunity.

Current proposals would harm the *Lifeline* program by:

- eliminating service for approximately 70 percent of current participants, particularly mobile services;
- restricting voice service support to only low-income households in rural areas;
- installing a lifetime cap on *Lifeline* recipients; and
- placing an overall budget cap on the *Lifeline* program.

Please act to protect *Lifeline* and reject these draconian proposals. Rationing *Lifeline* hurts low-income Americans and hurts our nation. Rationing *Lifeline* is contrary to the intent of Universal Service and limits the ability of the program to help connect the poor to communications service. This proposal overlooks the purpose of the *Lifeline* program, which is to address the barrier to connectivity caused by poverty. *Lifeline* helps low-income Americans afford modern communications service.

Americans need *Lifeline*: by making vital, crucial communications services affordable and available, we are not asking people to choose between their link to the outside world and other basic necessities. I urge you to not only preserve *Lifeline* but to also expand it so that all Americans may have access to communication.

Thank you in advance for your attention to the position of the NAACP. Should you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at my office at (202) 463-2940.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Hilary O. Shelton', with a stylized, flowing script.

Hilary O. Shelton
Director, NAACP Washington Bureau &
Senior Vice President for Policy and Advocacy